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The Trib, Citing a Lack of Ads, Ends Publication After 3 Months

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The Trib, the morning newspaper that began publication here three months ago, announced that it had ceased publication with yesterday's issue.

Leonard Saffir, the paper's editor in chief, publisher and founder, said that "\$1 million more would have been needed" to keep the paper alive and that this money was just not forthcoming. He said that "close to \$5 million" had been put into the newspaper so far.

Mr. Saffir attributed the demise of the newspaper mainly to the business community, which he said had enthusiastically supported the idea of a new paper, but then had refused to give it their advertising dollars.

"It was the business community that killed this paper," Mr. Saffir said. "Specifically, it was Macy's, Gimbels, Bloomingdale's and the like. I'd say we got good support from national advertising, but not from the New York retailer."

Weather Blamed

Mr. Saffir also blamed the rigors of "the worst winter in history." He said the weather played havoc with distribution and production. The paper, which came out five days a week, was printed in New Jersey and distributed throughout the New York metropolitan area.

According to Mr. Saffir, The Trib began with an initial circulation of 200,000 copies a day and was running somewhat under 100,000 copies this week. However, sources within the newspaper industry said that The Trib's paid circulation was well below 40,000 and that the remaining copies were given away. These sources said that there were "massive returns of unsold copies by newsdealers every day."

Rumors had been flying throughout departments of the newspaper all week that the end might be near. Reporters and editors had been warily watching reports of the negotiations between The New York Times, The Daily News and The Post and the 10 unions whose contracts with those newspapers expired last week. The speculation was that if these newspapers went on strike, The Trib, which does not have any unions, would survive.

Mr. Saffir called an emergency session of the board of directors yesterday afternoon, and the decision was made to close. He then walked into the newsroom and made his announcement to as many of the 140 employees as were able to assemble.

On the wall in the newsroom was a large sign proclaiming the newspaper's slogan: "The Trib: It Should Have Happened Sooner." A man walked over to the wall and tore it down.

"It should have happened later," he muttered.

Mr. Saffir described the paper's philosophy yesterday as "independent with a bias for New York City." He said that the paper, which was tabloid size, "not only to report the grim stories in New York but the bright ones, too."

The newspaper was owned by a group of about a dozen private investors, according to Mr. Saffir, who was an aide to James L. Buckley, when Mr. Buckley was a Conservative-Republican United States Senator from New York. Mr. Buckley was a director of the paper.

The chairman of the board of directors was Raymond A. Learsy, president of Agricultural and Industrial Chemicals, and a brother-in-law of Senator Buckley. When Mr. Learsy became chairman about a week after the newspaper had begun publication, he put three of his own people on the board of directors, according to Mr. Saffir.

An Offer Refused

At a board meeting on March 30, Raymond Donovan, a partner in Schiavone Construction Company and a director of The Trib, offered to put more money into the paper if he could have equal representation on the board, Mr. Saffir said. The offer was voted down.

Mr. Saffir said that he was willing to talk to any investor who was willing to revive the paper, but he did not indicate that there was any real interest from anyone at this point. At one point, Vere Harmsworth, the British publisher and owner of Esquire magazine, had shown interest in The Trib, but negotiations collapsed.

In the last few days, issues of the newspaper have been running about 56 pages. The first few pages, which contained no advertising, were devoted to news of the New York metropolitan area, followed by several pages of national and foreign news. In the middle of the newspaper, there were several pages devoted to news of advertising and the media, entertainment and style.

"The concept was a sound one," Mr. Saffir said. "The format was a sound one. We thought we were breaking through."